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RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 0663

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RUEHBC/REO BASRAH IMMEDIATE 0020

RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH IMMEDIATE 0020

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 RIYADH 000767

SIPDIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR OVP, DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND S/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2018

TAGS: [IR](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [OVP](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)

SA

SUBJECT: S/I SATTERFIELD BRIEF TO SAUDIS ON IRAQ DEVELOPMENTS

REF: RIYADH 708

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1. (S) SUMMARY.** S/I Ambassador David Satterfield, along with MNF-I and Embassy Baghdad representatives, and Washington analysts, briefed three senior Saudi Arabian Government (SAG) officials on May 6 and 10: Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs Prince Mohammed Bin Naif (MBN), Chief of General Intelligence Prince Muqrin Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal. Satterfield and team reviewed in detail developments in Iraq, focusing on positive measures taken by Iraqi PM Maliki and the GOI on Sunni outreach and reconciliation and on the significance of the Basrah security operation. The team underscored the critical importance for the region of GOI efforts to push back on Iranian-backed violent groups and the growing upset within the Shia political leadership and on the Shia street with how Iran was acting inside Iraq. Now was a moment of opportunity, especially important given the dramatic events in Beirut, for Iraq's Arab neighbors to step forward with meaningful support and engagement. Muqrin and MBN were very receptive to the briefing, inviting further and more detailed discussion. Muqrin said that Iraqi National Security Advisor Rubaie would be invited to attend the next meeting of GCC plus Two intelligence chiefs; FM Saud, while still expressing skepticism regarding the strategic vice tactical quality of steps undertaken by Maliki (and dismissing ISCI head Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim as an Iranian stooge), acknowledged that progress appeared to be taking place and that it was in the strategic interest of the Arab states to respond. No Saudi Ambassador, however, would be sent at this time to Baghdad. END SUMMARY.

Prince MBN: "Our Goal (in Iraq) is the Same"

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¶ 12. (S) MBN stated repeatedly the need for a "unified Iraq," noting this represents both a political and a security challenge. He identified Iranian-backed groups such as Hizballah as the main threat to Iraq and the region. MBN acknowledged that Iraqi PM Maliki had begun to move against these groups, particularly in Basra, questioning "why it had taken so long" for Maliki to act. The delegation explained that the US had been urging action in Basrah for the past year, but only now had Maliki become persuaded that he had no alternative but to act to restore GOI control. When the PM was confronted in Basrah by open opposition from the JAM and grasped the extent of Iranian IRGC-QF support being provided, "he changed." More importantly, the appearance of the GOI and Iraqi Army actually working to halt the depredations of violent groups that had acted with impunity produced a dramatic response on the Iraqi street. All of Iraq's political leaders, including Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, had expressed support for the PM and his actions. However, the positive momentum established and the backing the PM now enjoyed needed to be translated into further tangible progress on reconciliation and security. MBN agreed that the U.S. and Iraq needed the support of Iraq's neighbors at this critical moment. MBN asked pointedly, "what is your goal?" to which Satterfield replied, "a unified, stable, secure Iraq not open to hostile foreign influence," at which point MBN stated, "Our goal is the same."

¶ 13. (S) MBN concluded by restating the problem of foreign

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fighters, noting that such "youth" are not going to Syria via Saudi Arabia but through states such as Bahrain with GCC cards. He stated that the Ulema and individual families need to become more involved on this issue. Finalizing the discussion on Iran, MBN said strongly that Iran has stated "Saudi Arabia is the number one enemy." MBN concluded the briefing by stating his desire to know who his counterpart in Iraq is, so that they may open security channels and exchange information. Satterfield promised a response from Embassy Baghdad on this point.

Prince Muqrin: A "Government for All Iraqis"

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¶ 14. (S) Prince Muqrin was the most engaged of all S/I's interlocutors, highly and positively receptive to information on recent developments in Iraq. In response to Satterfield's appreciation for Saudi efforts to provide assistance/humanitarian aid to Iraq as discussed with Ambassador Ries (Reftel), Muqrin said Saudi Arabia "does not seek a political benefit" from its actions, but questioned the use of Baghdad airport as the landing point for Saudi aid - as "local Iraqis don't see the Saudi side of humanitarian aid." Muqrin's suggestion was to send Saudi C-130s so that upon landing in more remote areas the Iraq people can see Saudi aid directly.

¶ 15. (S) During discussion of Muqtada Al-Sadr, Muqrin questioned whether or not Al-Sadr will "give up his arms," to which the delegation responded that while Sadr was negotiating turn over of medium and heavy arms, full disarmament was not likely in the immediate future. Satterfield made clear that the ultimate goal is disarmament of all/all illegal armed groups in Iraq, but in the short-term disarmament of armed elements engaged in violence is the priority. Muqrin was positive on both a SAG diplomatic presence in Baghdad as well as an Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting in Baghdad in June, but stated his apprehension regarding the safety of any future

SAG Ambassador to Iraq. Muqrin expressed concern for the Sunnis of Baghdad who are "the majority of refugees" in Jordan and Syria but made clear that he did not look at Iraq from a sectarian standpoint.. He noted that "Arab Shiites" of Iraq were "neglected" by Iran and were loyal to the Iraqi state; "there should be a government for all Iraqis: Christians, Sabians, Sunnis, and Shia."

¶ 6. (S) In a positive step, (and consistent with agreement reached in Bahrain during the April 21 GCC plus Two Ministerial attended by Secretary Rice that Iraq be made a permanent "plus Three"), Muqrin said that there would be a GCC plus Two intelligence chiefs meeting in Jeddah June 7-9 to which Mouaffaq Rubaie would be invited. Satterfield welcomed this as a positive signal of Arab engagement. Muqrin closed the meeting by inviting S/I to return for a longer review of Iraq developments following the Jeddah meeting.

FM Saud Al-Faisal: Skeptical But Progress Acknowledged

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¶ 7. (S) FM Saud did not repeat his customary flat dismissal of PM Maliki as sectarian or responsive to Iranian command, acknowledging "albeit cautiously" that "real progress appears to have been made by Maliki" on Sunni outreach and on confronting Iranian-backed violent groups. To the

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extent that this represented a strategic vice tactical shift by Maliki, especially regarding Iran's behavior and influence, this was a very significant development. Saud suggested more time was needed to determine the answer. Satterfield responded that the changes taking place in Iraq needed to become "strategic" and irreversible, but that "waiting to see the outcome" would not contribute to that goal. Now was the moment to engage and Saudi Arabia had a critical role to play among the Arab states. The U.S. could not and should not be alone in Iraq challenging Iran and AQI; we needed the active support of our key allies and partners in the GCC plus Two. Such support could take many forms, and we welcomed Saudi work with us on providing assistance resources. But more direct engagement by the SAG and the other Arab states in Baghdad was also needed. Saud acknowledged that it would be important to back the "apparent positive steps" being undertaken by Maliki and the GOI.

¶ 8. (S) Queried by Amb Satterfield as to the meaning of Saudi King Abdullah's statement to Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus during their recent visit to Riyadh (Reftel) that it was imperative for the SAG that the upcoming provincial elections, as well as future national elections, be "fair," Saud said that the King meant that elections had to be open only to Iraqis, not "Persians." He stated that in the past Iran has sent agents to Iraq on election day to thwart both the process and hence the unity of Iraq. Saud suggested that the U.S. consider requiring a language test at the door to each voting station, where a prospective voter would have to show fluency in Arabic in order to vote. Saud continued that the key to security in Iraq is distinguishing those who are for and those who are against unity. However, ascertaining such loyalties in a place like Iraq is like "trying to hold a handful of sand; the grains always fall through." Saud stressed, as he has done before, that Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani needs to come "out of hiding" into the political arena and forcefully argue for Iraqi unity; America cannot "leave him on the periphery."

¶ 9. (S) Like many of his GCC plus Two colleagues (with the notable exception of Egyptian General Intelligence Service Chief Soleiman (Septel), Saud assessed Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sadrists Movement as "Arab nationalist," and urged that the U.S. ensure the ability of the Sadrists to participate

in the national and provincial political process.

Satterfield

assured that the U.S. was making clear to Maliki, ISCI leader Abd al-Aziz Hakim (whom Saud bluntly characterized as "purely Iranian") and all of Iraq's political leaders that the door had to be open to such participation by the Sadr Movement "on the basis of their acceptance of a peaceful political process and abandonment of violence.

¶10. (S) Saud noted that PM Maliki "can not do everything," and thus needed a "popular general" who could mobilize all Iraqis who "support unity." Iraq needs new policies for the sake of national unity, and Maliki is "not a man of new ideas." Saud concluded by noting that he was strongly supportive of a meeting of Arab League FMs in Baghdad in June. There would be no/no Saudi Ambassador in Baghdad in the near future, for security reasons. While he showed interest in a lower level SAG permanent diplomatic presence in Baghdad, Saud made clear that even this might not come about soon. He then quoted an old proverb to the effect that, "a ship sails to the wishes of the wind,

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not its captain."

¶11. (U) Ambassador Satterfield has cleared this cable.

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